

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Gill Lice in North Carolina Trout

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Fresh off of discovering whirling disease for the first time in North Carolina, fisheries biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission recently confirmed gill lice on rainbow trout in three North Carolina streams.

Gill lice—which are actually tiny, white crustaceans—attach to a fish’s gill, which can inhibit the fish’s ability to breathe. While most fish are able to tolerate a moderate infestation of gill lice, some fish, particularly those suffering from other stressors like drought or high water temperatures, can succumb.

This is the second time gill lice have been found in North Carolina trout. They were first discovered on brook trout in Macon County in 2014. The gill lice confirmed this summer were found on rainbow trout in Haywood and Watauga counties.

Biologists ask that anglers be diligent when cleaning fishing equipment and offer these recommendations:

- Remove any visible mud, plants, fish or animals before transporting equipment;
- Eliminate water from equipment before transporting; and,
- Clean and dry anything that comes into contact with water.

In addition, biologists stress the importance of not moving fish from one body of water to another. Not only is it illegal, but it is also one of the primary ways gill lice, whirling disease, and other aquatic nuisance species are spread.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.